Choose Ohio First
FY26 Request for Proposals (RFP)
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

February 20, 2026

1. **Will there be an information session?** An information session will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Friday, January 23rd. This is a virtual session, and it will be recorded. The recording will be posted with the RFP materials on the ODHE RFP webpage. Attendees must register using the following URL and are encouraged to submit questions along with their registration: https://oh-tech.webex.com/weblink/register/re5c156c1c9be67055d68216027d22b3b

2. **Where can I find the letter with the maximum amount my institution can apply for through the FY26 round?** The President of each participating institution received two emails on December 17. The first email from Chancellor Duffey announced the RFP. The second email from Dr. Rice included a letter with the maximum amount each institution can apply for over the four-year program period. You can request a copy of the letter from the COF staff.

3. **Is the maximum award amount in the letter to the institution's president the total for the four-year period or an annual maximum?** It is the total maximum amount for the four-year period.

4. **Are the enrollment numbers (historical, baseline, and pledge) supposed to reflect all STEM disciplines, or only those on which we focused on in our COF proposal?** Enrollment numbers should reflect the STEM CIP codes that are the focus on the COF proposal.

5. **The Excel file asks for enrollment data. Should we include all enrollment in STEM at that time, so for 23/24 are we talking about all STEM students (freshmen-seniors in STEM), or is it asking for incoming STEM enrollment (just freshmen)?** It is asking for enrollment of all students of all ranks in the selected CIP codes.

6. **Page 3 of the FY26 COF RFP does not list Tab 5: Budget Table as needing to be completed on the COF FY26 Application Excel File. Do we need to complete Tab 5?** The omission was an error. Tab 5 does need to be completed.

7. **Can we recruit different numbers of students for each year of the award?** For example, cohort 1 AY27 = 12 students; cohort 2 AY28 = 10 students". Yes. Use the enrollment growth pledge table and supporting material, to propose the enrollment growth that you think is reasonable and achievable each year of the program period. Include an explanation in the narrative

8. **Does the FY26 COF program require 1:1 matching funds from the institution?** The FY26 COF program requires 1:1 matching funds. The program allows for a variety of sources of matching funds that directly impact the COF program. Refer to the COF Financial Aid Guidance Memo on the Grantee Resources page for more information about allowing sources of matching funds. https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/affordability/choose-ohio-first/cof-grantee-resources

9. **Can we request more than the amount in the letter?** If your institution expects greater than expected growth in scholarship eligible STEM enrollment over the next four years, you may request funds exceeding the maximum award. If you choose to do so, your institution will be required to provide compelling evidence that it will be in a position to fully utilize this funding within the award period. ODHE will consider this request and make a determination as part of the RFP process.

10. **How flexible are GPA requirements for COF scholars at the institutional level?** The COF program does not have a GPA requirement. GPA requirements are established by the institution. Institutions are required to report students' GPAs and the support provided to students when a GPA drops below 3.0.

11. **Can funds be stacked with other scholarships, or are there limits on combining awards?** Institutions often award other scholarships along with COF scholarships. Please refer to question 8 regarding matching funds and to the Financial Aid Guidance Memo for more information about scholarship amounts.

The Ohio Revised Code restricts the use of scholarships from multiple COF awards. Students cannot receive funds from more than one COF award made to an Awardee by ODHE in any one academic year. However, an additional award may be issued if the additional award is for a certificate.

12. **What changes are in the FY26 RFP, what additional information is needed, etc.?** Please attend the informational webinar, review the webinar slides, and compare this RFP with past RFPs to determine what has changed in the FY26 RFP.

13. **Will this be the new model for COF grants moving forward with the average funding amounts?** ODHE has not initiated discussions about future rounds.

14. **If we are funded for the FY25 program, how does (or how can) the potential overlap in funding work with the FY26 competition?** Institutions need to determine the best strategy for their institution regarding how to use various COF awards to recruit students and increase enrollment and completions.

15. **The RFP references the use of a "standard font." Could you clarify what is considered a standard font and, if possible, provide examples (e.g., Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri)?** The examples provided are appropriate.

16. **In prior COF cycles, the target audience for recruitment and selection could include first-generation, Appalachian rural, and urban students. Has there been a shift in emphasis toward awarding students who are furthest from opportunity, or has the recruitment and selection scope been broadened to focus primarily on any student pursuing an eligible CIP, regardless of background?** The Ohio Revised Code sections related to Choose Ohio First have not changed. Institutions determine the recruiting strategy for their institution and a COF program.

17. **The RFP indicates that institutions may request funding in excess of the maximum award amount if compelling evidence is provided. Could you please clarify what would constitute "compelling evidence" and, if possible, share examples to guide applicants in preparing such requests?** An institution's evidence could include enrollment data and trends, strategic plans and committed investment to academic programs and disciplines, and other activities that support recruitment, retention, and completion.

18. **Could you please provide additional detail and clarification regarding the Enrollment Growth Pledge?** Specifically, guidance on expectations, metrics, and how compliance will be assessed would be helpful, as this requirement is currently somewhat unclear. ODHE encourages institutions to develop a strategy that could help it achieve its enrollment growth plan. Metrics could be location and program specific. ODHE may review enrollment, retention, and completion data using HEI and other resources to determine success with meeting the enrollment growth pledge.

19. **What does ODHE prefer as far as focus on one, building one and including others, or just addressing all CIPs in proposals?** Institutions need to determine the best strategy for their institution regarding the focus of their COF program and present a compelling case for how the institution will use COF funds to recruit students, increase enrollment and completions.

20. **What counts for institutional 1:1 match, e.g., existing funding to support experiential learning opportunities?** Please refer to the [Financial Aid Guidance Memo](#) for the Choose Ohio First program for details regarding matching funds. The Financial Aid Guidance Memo can be found on the [Grantee Resources Page](#) on the ODHE website.

21. **What is the commitment based on, increasing overall STEM grads or specific disciplines?** The enrollment growth pledge is based on the specific disciplines (CIPs) selected by the institution for their COF program.

22. **Do you anticipate completion grants to be offered going forward?** Yes. It is an intention of the program to support students to completion. The ability to fund completion grants is contingent on funding availability.

23. **What is a driving goal or intention for recipients of the FY26 RFP grant?** Please refer to the Program Purpose in the RFP.

24. **Will the completion grants continue to be 3 years following the end of the recruitment period?** ODHE has not determined the exact parameters of a completion grant for the FY26 funding round. ORC 3333.68 allows for completion awards for up to four years.

25. **I noticed there's not required budget narrative per se except for the budget elements defined (last two bullet points) in the Project Rationale Section (3-a) ... Please confirm and**

the Budget table on tab 5 of excel sheet. The budget narrative is included in the Project Description and Rationale section of the Project Narrative.

26. **Can you confirm? Is the enrollment pledge focused on Ohio residents only in the selected programs?** The enrollment pledge is based on total growth, Ohio residents and non-residents, in the selected STEM programs.

27. **Is the enrollment growth pledge just for the identified CIP codes for the proposal, or all STEM majors at the institution?** The enrollment pledge is based on the selected STEM programs.

28. **Is the 2023-2025 STEM enrollment a total of all COF awards we hold?** List the total number of students enrolled in the selected STEM CIP(s).

29. **What do we do since our institution did not receive a letter with the maximum award amount for the FY26 program?** Maximum institutional award amounts were established based on actual COF scholarship amounts awarded over a prior three-year period. Institutions with limited or no history with the program did not receive a maximum award amount letter because ODHE did not have enough information to calculate a reliable and predictive maximum award amount. Institutions with limited or no history with the program can request funding based on their specific COF recruitment, enrollment, and performance goals. Institutions can contact the COF staff to confirm if a maximum award amount letter was provided to their institution.

30. **Is there a limit to how much more an institution can request over the initial letter amount?** No, but requests for more than the maximum amount provided by ODHE should be supported by the proposal and the institution's specific recruitment, enrollment, and performance goals.

31. **Is there a recommended max amount over the suggested institutional max (in the letters sent out) for asking for an increased amount above the amount recommended on the letter?** No. The maximum amount was determined using actual COF expenditures by the institution. Requests for more than the maximum amount provided by ODHE should be supported by the proposal and the institution's specific recruitment, enrollment, and performance goals.

32. **Can you please clarify the maximum budget request? If Maximum amount is based on actual spend in AYs '23 '24, and '25, do we take the average of these years?** Applicants do not need to calculate the maximum amount over the three-year period. ODHE calculated the maximum amount and provided that amount to the President of each participating institution on December 17. Institutions can contact the COF staff to confirm if a maximum award amount letter was provided to their institution.

33. **How do we request a replacement award letter?** Institutions can contact the COF staff to confirm if a maximum award amount letter was provided to their institution.

34. **Is the amount in the award letter for one year, or the full four possible years of the award?** It is the total maximum amount for the four-year period.

35. **Annually, what information about enrollment should we expect to provide? Overall enrollment as of census?** And STEM Enrollment? (and is the STEM enrollment Ohio residents only?). ODHE encourages institutions to develop a strategy that could help it achieve its enrollment growth plan. Metrics could be location and program specific. ODHE may review enrollment, retention, and completion data using HEI and other resources to determine success with meeting the enrollment growth pledge.

36. **In the past, an example was included with the budget tab. Is the state able to provide examples of the budget and the enrollment growth pledge?** No. Recruitment, enrollment, and completion strategies may be unique to institutions and their COF proposal. As such, we do not want to limit institutions by providing an example.

37. **Can we still include appendices and, if so, is there a page limit?** The RFP does not include appendices. Reviewers are under no obligation to review material other than what is requested in the RFP.

38. **I want to make sure my understanding is correct: A student who changes their major can change to any CIP on the eligible FY26 list and still receive their COF funding, even if the new CIP is NOT a CIP from our grant agreement?** Yes, that is correct. For the FY26 program only, the institution will have the discretion to offer scholarships to students who are not majoring in a program with one of the institution's selected CIPs, if the student is in a major with a CIP that is on the FY26 Eligible CIP list. Only students in the selected CIPs will count toward the institution's enrollment growth pledge.

39. **Does this new rule related to how students can receive COF funds for any eligible CIP, not just our approved ones, apply to existing grants?** No. The new rule about eligibility will only apply to the FY26 funding round and students who are awarded scholarships from the FY26 program. Institutions can request CIP changes to existing award agreements to accommodate the need for additional CIPs to support evolving workforce needs and academic programs.

40. **ALSO, you now require "double spaced" lines? That greatly reduces space for answers with a 21-page narrative max. Same multi-component questions but 50% less space to answer?** That is correct. The FY26 RFP requires less information upfront and emphasizes outcomes and performance.

41. **Should we include [specific program/CIPS] in our proposal?** Each institution should consider the purpose of the COF program, specifically to increase the STEM workforce in Ohio, and determine its own strategy to increase enrollment and completion with the support of the COF Scholarship Program.

42. **We believe the maximum award amount should be higher than what was provided by ODHE. Can we work with ODHE to compare records?** ODHE is open to working with institutions to explain the maximum award amount calculation after the RFP has closed. Participating institutions have been given the latitude to develop a proposal that requests more than the provided maximum award amount and can submit a proposal that explains or justifies that request based on past and future outcomes.

43. **Lab Fees are eligible under the FY26 program. Does this extend to past COF awards?** This question is not related to the FY26 RFP.

44. **For the growth pledge, are we reporting on the current and projected enrollment of COF-recipient students in the selected CIPs, or on overall students at the institution enrolled in that CIP (whether or not they receive a COF scholarship)?** The enrollment growth pledge should include overall students at the institution enrolled in that CIP, not just the COF-recipient students in the selected CIP.

45. **To fully address the Regional and Statewide Economic Needs and Strengths requirement, we see that this section focuses on programs aligned with the regional/state economy and**

JobsOhio talent pipeline goals. Is there a location within [OhioMeansJobs](#) where we can view employment projections including information on occupations expected to grow or decline over the coming years? Institutions may want to refer to:

- OhioMeansJobs Workforce Demand and Supply Tools https://workforcedatatools.chrr.ohio-state.edu/
- Ohio Longitudinal Data Archive https://chrr.osu.edu/ohio-longitudinal-data-archive
- Ohio Labor Market Information https://ohiolmi.com/
- The Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation Top Jobs List https://topjobs.ohio.gov/top-jobs-list
- JobsOhio Regional Network partners https://www.jobsohio.com/why-ohio/explore-our-regions

46. **We are currently in the middle of an existing COF grant. I see that we received a letter inviting us to apply for the FY26 competition, due March 2. Are we eligible to have two concurrent COF grants working at the same time?   This seems hard for us to keep track of and manage our enrollment pledges separately for the two grants.** Yes, it is allowable for institutions to have multiple, overlapping Choose Ohio First award agreements and programs. The FY26 funding round has some significant differences from previous rounds which should be taken into consideration as you evaluate what will be needed to run two programs.

47. **In past awards, we were able to substitute in new students to a COF cohort if we lost a student to early matriculation or transfer or a change in major to an ineligible CIP code. Is that no longer allowed?** Yes, institutions are still allowed to award scholarships to internal and external transfer students, as long as the student is new to the program at the institution.

48. **The RFP indicates that annual funding will be determined based on recruitment and retention performance metrics. However, the RFP does not specify how institutions should implement funding decreases if performance targets are not met. Could you please clarify the expected approach if funding is reduced in a given year:**
- **Should institutions reduce scholarship amounts for currently enrolled COF scholars?**
- **Should institutions limit or eliminate awards for incoming cohorts while maintaining commitments to current scholars?**
- **Is there flexibility for institutions to determine how to manage reduced allocations?**

Understanding the preferred approach will help us plan sustainable award strategies and ensure we can honor multi-year commitments to students. ODHE anticipates providing directions to awarded institutions during the award period prior to any changes in award amounts.

49. **If an application requests funding above the established cap and that request is not approved, would the award default to the capped amount, or does the department retain discretion to approve a different award amount that exceeds the cap but is less than the initial amount requested?** The RFP notes "The Chancellor shall make the final decisions based on the quality of the proposal in addressing the RFP criteria". ODHE encourages applicants to review the entire RFP that includes several references to the award process.

50. **We wanted to inquire whether programs that are currently in the process of being assigned or approved for new CIP codes, but are not yet active, may be included in our RFP submission. While these programs are not active at this time, they are expected to be fully approved and operational by the time the grant goes into effect. Please let us know if it is permissible to include these CIP codes under these circumstances.** Institutions may include any CIPs from the eligible list in their proposal, and they may also petition to add CIPs that are not currently listed. We encourage institutions to focus on developing COF programs that align with the goals outlined in the RFP and submit those programs to ODHE through the proposal.

51. **We have a colleague from the College of Business who would like to gain clarity on how they could propose that CIPs that are only awarded at the graduate level be awarded at the undergraduate level. She is unclear why certain BUSINESS programs are only approved at the graduate level when federally it is considered a STEM major I hope the question makes sense.** The Chancellor has the authority to establish the list of eligible CIPs for the COF program and has selected CIPs that align with the state's priorities. Institutions can petition to include new CIPs or to change the eligible degree level of CIPs on the FY26 Eligible CIP List through the proposal process.

52. **The program dates caught me off guard. I assumed funds would be available in Fall 2026. Can you confirm that this is really not to be used until Fall 2027 class?** We can confirm that the FY26 funding round will be a four-year program period, May 1, 2027, through June 30, 2031.

    The FY26 COF program requires a pledge to increase enrollment. Each year, ODHE will evaluate the performance of the institution and issue a dynamic annual award letter based on performance.

ODHE considered institutions' need for a full recruitment cycle and determined that starting the funding in AY2027-2028 would provide institutions time to implement and strengthen recruitment efforts in order to meet their enrollment growth pledge.

Information about the program dates and other differences between past funding rounds and the current RFP were highlighted in the webinar we offered on January 23. You can find a recording of the webinar and the slide deck with the RFP information at https://rfp.ohiohighered.org/. Applicants are encouraged to read the complete RFP carefully and not rely solely on the abbreviated information in the webinar.

53. **If we have a student who moves from Accounting to Math and we want to offer them a COF scholarship, do we have to have Math in our award agreement?** You do not need to have Math in your award agreement for the student to be eligible. However, you will need Math in your award agreement for that student to count toward your enrollment growth pledge.

54. **Will ODHE be evaluating enrollment growth pledge each year or upon graduations?** ODHE will evaluate programs throughout the award period to determine if the institution is progressing toward or meeting their enrollment growth pledge.

55. **I wanted to ask if the maximum is flexible?** The Maximum Award Letter states, "If your institution expects greater than expected growth in scholarship eligible STEM enrollment over the next four years, you may request funds exceeding the maximum award."

56. **I see that 30.7102 is on the approved CIP list. The program of interest that we are considering to add to the new funding opportunity (if possible) is an MBA with a concentration in Applied AI for Business. Would this be a program that would be eligible for new funding?** Eligibility is based on the academic program in which the student is enrolled. Each academic program has a CIP code assigned to it by the institution and is used to report to IPEDS. The student must be enrolled in an academic program with a CIP code that is in the award agreement, and CIPs in the award agreement must be on the Eligible CIP List. With the limited exception of Associate of Science programs and some Education programs, a student's focus, concentration, or intended major are not the same as enrolled in the major and do not make someone eligible for a COF scholarship. A commonly used CIP for MBA programs, 52.0201 - Business Administration and Management, General, is not on the COF Eligible CIP List.

57. **I am interested in my proposal including agronomy and have been preparing the proposal accordingly. I looked in the list of approved CIP codes and found "011201 - soils science and agronomy, general" so that seemed clear to me that agronomy is eligible. However, agronomy is a concentration of an agriculture major at our school and when I looked into how our institution**

reports our agronomy concentration ag majors, we use code "011102 - agriculture - agronomy" . **So that is how we report out our agronomy graduates to IPEDS, clearinghouses, etc. So, the question is whether I can choose the CIP code that you have approved, which clearly mentions agronomy, for my agronomy majors even though our institution reports it out to other entities differently.** The CIP(s) used for COF awards, agreements, student transcripts, and payments must match the CIP(s) used at the institution for the academic program for IPEDs reporting. Institutions can request to add CIPs to the FY26 COF Approved CIP list through their proposal. This flexibility could be used to accommodate situations like the one you described and/or give institutions the ability to meet local and statewide economy and employment opportunities that the FY26 COF Approved CIP List did not include. Institutions are encouraged to demonstrate how the requested CIP is a STEM program closely related to an approved CIP and meets the goals of the COF program. There is no guarantee that requested CIP(s) will be approved.

58. **In writing last year's RFP, we were targeting 5 years of incoming cohorts, with 4 year's of funding for each cohort. My confusion is in the funding being from 27-31. It appears to me that I am writing this proposal for only 1 incoming cohort and the money will follow that cohort for their 4 years (e.g. $52K per year each year), which is in contrast to the prior award. However, it is possible that I am just mis-reading this and it is more like the prior proposal, and that I should anticipate growth in the program so something like $52K first year, $108K second year (increase from 13 to 14 awardees, but paying year 1 of cohort 2 and the 2nd year of cohort 1, then $168K paying cohort 1, 2, and 3, etc.). Please clarify this point for me.** You can build your budget in either of the ways you described. This model gives institutions the ability to tailor the funding to their enrollment growth and the length of the academic program. For example, a program that supports a 1-year certificate program might need one year of funding for each student and propose 4 cohorts; a program of bachelor's degrees may request four years of funding for each student and determine how many cohorts they want to run based on completion grant funding. A 2-year nursing program might want to run 2 consecutive cohorts, while another might want to run a new cohort each year and have three consecutive and overlapping cohorts. You determine if you want to/need to build in funding for continuing students based on the academic program. Review of the proposals will be based on the principles outlined in the RFP – driving enrollment and completions and connecting students to employment opportunities in Ohio. The responses to questions 7 and 36 might also be helpful to you.

59. **Should we make an enrollment growth pledge by program or in aggregate across the selected CIPs?** Institutions need to determine the best strategy for their institution regarding their commitment for enrollment growth. The Excel Application Form is designed to capture information in the aggregate. Information in the project narrative and rationale section of the proposal can be used to augment information in the Excel Application Form.

60. **Would I just enter the CIP Code we use [when we would like to appeal to add to the FY26 Choose Ohio First Eligible CIP List] somewhere on the excel spreadsheet, or only reference the not included CIP Code in the body of the proposal with a suggestion of including it in the text? Or would I just select what I am arguing is a comparable CIP code from the excel spreadsheet?**

    In the instance where you want to request CIPs for a FY26 COF program that are not on the FY26 COF Eligible CIP list,

    1) use the narrative portion of the proposal to support the request
    2) use the CIP tab in the FY26 Proposal Required Excel Template to select any CIPs from the list that you want to include in your proposal
    3) add a <u>new tab in the FY26 Proposal Required Excel Template</u> and list any CIPs that are not on the eligible list that you want to add
    4) label the tab for the new sheet "Requested CIPs"

61. **What numbers do you want to see in the budget table. For example, if we plan to admit 10 students per year, should I say 10 students in each of the four years, or should I say 10, 20, 30 and 40 to indicate for new and continuing students?** List the number of students you plan to award each year of the award, including both new students being recruited in that academic year and existing students being retained through completion.

62. **I notice that this time around, for the CIPs Tab on the required excel template, there is NOT a column for SOC codes/occupation pathways etc. Is this an oversight, or do we NOT have to include SOCs??. IN the past we have included (as an attachment) SOC info in a Lightcast LMI report to back-up our 'Regional and Statewide Economic Needs and Strengths' information (section F in this year's RFP-defined narrative sequence).** This was an intentional change to the application and not an oversight. Institutions are invited to provide relevant information about how the proposal will meet an educational need and the needs of the regional and statewide economies through the narrative and attachments.